



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590



JUN 04 2001

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: ACTION MEMORANDUM- Request for an Emergency Removal Action at the Harrison Street Post Office Mercury Spill site, Cook County, Chicago, Illinois
Site ID# = B5X2

FROM: Ken Theisen, On-Scene Coordinator
Response Section III

TO: Richard C. Karl, Chief
Emergency Response Branch

THRU: Linda Nachowicz, Chief
Response Section III

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to request and document your approval to expend up to \$10,000 and to confirm your verbal approval for the same, in order to eliminate threats to the public health, welfare and the environment at the Harrison Street Post Office Mercury Spill site. The response action was necessary to mitigate the immediate threat to public health, welfare and the environment posed by the release of metallic mercury in the parking lot of the Harrison Street Post Office. This facility is located at 358 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois.

The emergency response action was conducted pursuant to Section 104 (a)(1) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) 42 U.S.C. §9604(a)(1) as amended, by locating, recovering and cleaning up the mercury spilled in the parking lot of the Harrison Street Post Office, located at 358 Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois. The Response Action included the disposal of the mercury and the mercury contaminated debris, including ice and snow.

The cleanup action required one day and miscellaneous off site hours to arrange transportation and disposal of the mercury and associated debris. The action was considered an emergency due to the presence of metallic mercury in an active parking lot of a very busy facility. In the parking lot, the mercury could have been easily spread by vehicular traffic and could have become an attraction nuisance to children in the area. The container of mercury, still intact, contained a large amount of the metal, approximately four pounds.

The Harrison Street Post Office Mercury Spill is not on the National Priorities List (NPL).

II. SITE CONDITIONS AND BACKGROUND

CERCLIS ID# = ILN000508153

A. Physical Location and Description

The Harrison Street Post Office is located at 358 West Harrison Street, Cook County, Chicago, Illinois. The site coordinates are latitude 41° 52' 28" North and longitude 87° 38' 12" West.

B. Environmental Justice Analysis

In Illinois, the low income percentage is 58% or greater and the minority percentage is 50% or greater. To meet the Environmental Justice (EJ) criteria, the area within one mile of the site must have a population that's twice the state low-income percentage or/and twice the state minority percentage. That is, the area must be at least 58% low income and/or 50% minority. At this site, the low income percentage is 0 % and the minority percentage is 0 %, as determined by Land View III EJ analysis. Therefore, this site does not meet the Region's EJ criteria based on demographics as identified in Region V interim Guidelines for Identifying and Addressing a Potential EJ Case, June 1998. Since the site is located in downtown Chicago, there are very few, if any residences in the area; hence the percentages as shown above.

C. On Saturday evening, January 27, 2001, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) Region V phone duty officer received a call from the City of Chicago Department of Environment (CDOE), concerning a mercury spill that had occurred in the parking lot of the Harrison Street Post Office. The United States Post Office (USPO) x-rayed a suspicious package addressed to the Chicago Police Department (CPD). The Post Office called the Chicago Police Department Bomb Squad. Inside the cardboard package was a section of pvc pipe approximately 10 inches long and two inches in diameter, capped on each end. The x-rays indicated a small bottle in the pipe that was presumed to contain mercury.

The bomb squad used a blank "popper load" in a 12 gauge shotgun to blow the end off of the pvc pipe. They did this in the parking lot of the Post Office. Although the bomb squad was successful in opening one end of the pipe, they were unaware that the "Brut" aftershave bottle had leaked several teaspoons of mercury into the pipe. The force of the explosion caused the leaked mercury to be splattered over a 20' x 20' area of the parking lot. Very fortunately, the aftershave bottle did not break, as it contained up to 4 pounds of mercury.

Consequently, the CDOE called U.S. EPA Region V phone duty officer and asked for out assistance. It was agreed that the parking lot be sealed off and guarded by the USPO law enforcement officers until the U.S. EPA's On-Scene Coordinator arrived early the next morning.

Upon arriving at the site the next morning, the OSC found the parking lot guarded and shortly a representative of the CDOE arrived on scene as well as a maintenance worker from the USPO. The OSC determined that the maintenance worker had no idea if the USPO would be responsible for the cleanup, or when such an activity would take place. After observing metallic mercury visible on the ice and snow of the parking lot, the OSC asked for and received a verbal authorization for \$10,000 from the Phone Duty OSC, thus allowing the clean-up to begin.

The Emergency Response Services (ERS) contractor arrived on site by noon, and by 3:00 pm, three drums containing the mercury contaminated debris, including mainly ice and snow from the parking lot and one five-gallon pail containing the bottle of mercury, had been staged awaiting transportation and disposal sometime later in the week. The OSC asked that surveillance be maintained in the parking lot where the drums were to be stored until disposal could take place. Evidence, including the pvc pipe and a letter from the individual who caused the incident, were turned over to the postal inspector.

III. THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, OR TO THE ENVIRONMENT, AND STATUTORY AND REGULATORY AUTHORITIES.

The conditions at the Site presented a release and a potential threat of release of a CERCLA hazardous substance, presenting an imminent and substantial endangerment to the public health, welfare and the environment and meet the criteria for an emergency removal action provided for in the National Contingency Plan (NCP), 40 C.F.R. § 300.415(b)(2). These criteria include:

- 1) Actual or potential exposure to nearby populations, animals, or the food chain from hazardous substances or pollutants or contaminants.

This factor was present at the Site due to metallic mercury scattered in an active parking lot. The mercury, if not cleaned up, could have been spread into peoples homes and/or come into direct contact with the population.

Mercury poses a threat through inhalation, ingestion, and direct contact routes of exposure and can result in severe nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea, kidney and liver damage, and even death. Metallic mercury is highly toxic when the vapors are inhaled and attacks the central nervous system by destroying neurons.

Metallic mercury is a characteristic hazardous waste under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), 42 U.S.C. §6901 et. Seq., as amended, and CFR §261.24. Mercury exhibits the characteristics of toxicity D009 and is therefore a hazardous substance under Section 101 (14) of CERCLA 43 U.S.C. §9601 (14).

- 2) The availability of other appropriate federal or state response mechanisms to respond to the release.

The CDOE does not perform mercury cleanup actions and the apparent lack of a response mechanism by the USPO to be able to respond in a timely manner, left the U.S. EPA as the only viable option.

IV. ENDANGERMENT DETERMINATION

Given the Site conditions, the nature of the suspected hazardous substances on Site, and the potential exposure pathways described in Sections II and III above, actual or threatened releases of hazardous substances from this Site, if not addressed by implementing the response actions selected in this Memorandum, may have presented an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health, welfare, or the environment.

V. PROPOSED ACTIONS AND ESTIMATED COSTS

The purpose of this emergency removal action was to mitigate the immediate threats posed to the public health, welfare, or the environment by the presence of the metallic mercury. Removal activities at the Site included the recovery of all the metallic mercury and associated debris and the off site disposal of all characteristics wastes identified and collected during the removal activities. Specifically, the following actions were performed:

- 1) Developed and implemented a site-specific Health and Safety Plan.
- 2) Arranged for Site security.
- 3) Collected into drums awaiting disposal, the mercury contaminated snow and ice.
- 4) Transported and disposed of, all hazardous substances, pollutants, wastes, or contaminants, at a RCRA approved disposal facility. This was done in accordance with the U.S. EPA Off-Site Rule, 40 CFR§300.440, 58 Federal Register 49215 (September 22, 1993).

Removal activities required one day for the actual removal action and several additional hours in the actual pick-up of the drums, once disposal had been arranged.

The OSC has initiated planning for the provision of post-removal Site control, consistent with the provisions of Section §300.415 (1) of the NCP. The nature of this emergency removal action (complete removal of mercury and mercury contaminated media from the Site) eliminated the need for any post removal Site control.

CONTRACTOR COST ESTIMATE

EXTRAMURAL COSTS

Cleanup Contractor Costs	\$6,000
Contingency 15%	\$ 900
Subtotal	\$6,900

Start	\$1,000
EXTRAMURAL SUBTOTAL	\$7,900
Extramural Contingency (15%)	\$1,200
TOTAL EXTRAMURAL	\$9,100
INTRAMURAL COSTS	
U.S. EPA Direct Costs (\$30 per hr. x 10 hrs.)	\$ 300
U.S. EPA Indirect Costs (\$60 per hr. x 10 hrs.)	\$ 600
TOTAL INTRAMURAL COSTS	\$ 900
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	\$10,000

The response actions described in this memorandum directly addressed the actual or threatened releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants at this Site, which may have posed an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health, welfare, or the environment. These response actions did not impose a burden on affected property disproportionate to the extent to which that property contributes to the conditions being addressed.

APPLICABLE OR RELEVANT AND APPROPRIATE REQUIREMENTS

All applicable, relevant and appropriate requirement's (ARAR's) are being complied with to the extent practicable. Federal ARAR's for this Site include RCRA, as the materials from this Site are being handled as RCRA characteristic waste.

VI. EXPECTED CHANGE IN THE SITUATION SHOULD ACTION BE DELAYED OR NOT TAKEN

Given the Site conditions, the nature of the hazardous substances documented on site and the potential exposure pathways to nearby populations described in Sections II and III above, actual or threatened release to hazardous substances from the Site, if not addressed by implementing the response actions selected in this Action Memorandum, would have presented an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health, welfare or the environment.

VII. OUTSTANDING POLICY ISSUES

This removal action requires consideration of the nationally significant issue of mercury and its

contaminants. Although this emergency did not involve inside contamination, it very easily could have turned into a massive and very expensive inside cleanup. Four pounds of metallic mercury could have contaminated many, many homes, schools and businesses if it had fallen into the wrong hands.

VIII. ENFORCEMENT

For administrative proposed, information concerning the enforcement strategy for this Site is contained in the Enforcement Confidential Addendum.

IX. RECOMMENDATION

This decision document represents the selected removal action for the Harrison Street Post Office Site developed in accordance with CERCLA, as amended, and is not inconsistent with the NCP. This decision was based upon the Administrative Record for the Site (see Attachment). Because the conditions at the Site meet the NCP 300.415 (b)(2) criteria for an emergency removal, I recommend your approval of this removal action. The total ceiling, if approved, will be \$10,000, of which, an estimated \$8,100 may be used for the cleanup contractor costs. You may indicate your decision by signing below.

APPROVE: _____


Chief, Emergency Response Branch

DATE: 6-4-01

DISAPPROVE: _____

Chief, Emergency Response Branch

DATE: _____

- Attachments:
1. Administrative Record
 2. Contractor Cost Estimate
 3. Enforcement Confidential

cc: C. Stanton, U.S. EPA, 5202-G
M. Chezick, U.S. DOI, w/o Enf. Addendum
T. Skinner, IEPA w/o Enf. Addendum

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ATTACHMENT 1

**U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REMOVAL ACTION**

**ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD
FOR
HARRISON STREET POST OFFICE MERCURY SPILL SITE
CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**ORIGINAL
FEBRUARY 14, 2001**

<u>NO.</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>RECIPIENT</u>	<u>TITLE/DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>PAGES</u>
1	00/00/00	Theisen, K., U.S. EPA	Karl, R., U.S. EPA	Action Memorandum: Request for an Emergency Removal Action at the Harrison Street Post Office Mercury Spill Site (PENDING)	

DETAILED CONTRACTOR COSTS

ATTACHMENT 2

Labor	Response Manager	\$2,000
	Technicians	\$1,500
	Total	\$3,500
Equipment	Trucks	\$ 500
	Mercury Vac	\$100
	PPE	\$500
	Misc.	\$1,000
	Total	\$2,100
T&D	4 Drums & 1 Pail	\$2,500
TOTAL		\$8,100

ENFORCEMENT ADDENDUM

HARRISON STREET POST OFFICE SPILL SITE
CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

APRIL 2001

ENFORCEMENT CONFIDENTIAL
NOT SUBJECT TO DISCOVERY

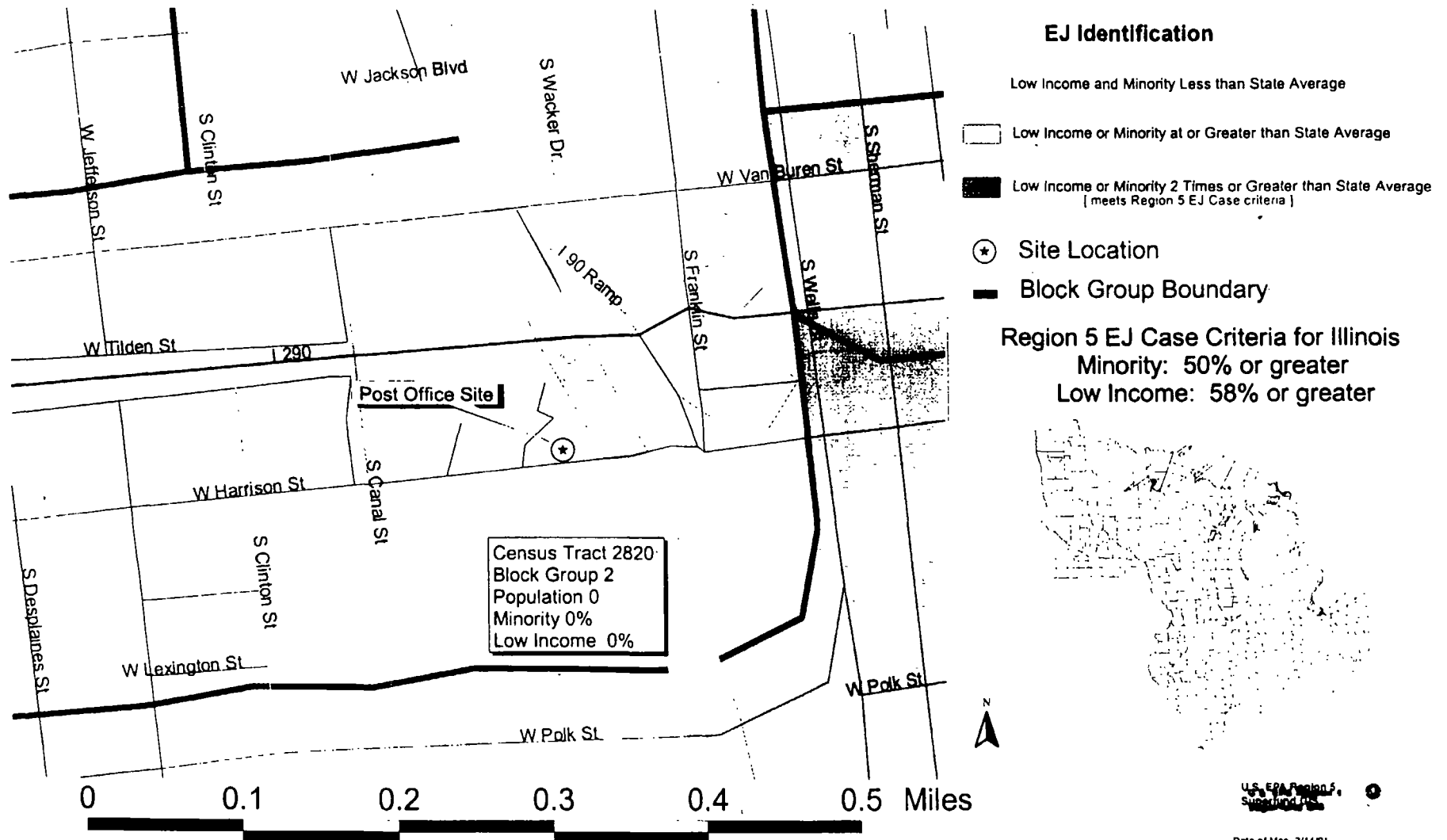
FOIA EXEMPT

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ENFORCEMENT CONFIDENTIAL
NOT SUBJECT TO DISCOVERY

Region 5 Superfund EJ Analysis

Harrison St. Post Office Mercury Spill Site Chicago, IL



State-County-TractBNA-BlockGrp: 17 031 2820 2

Query

Switc

Show Th
Census B

Sh

PERSONS 0
FAMILIES 0
HOUSEHOLDS 0

LAND AREA (sq. mi.) .185
LATITUDE +41873950
LONGITUDE -087641574

AGE_0_4 0 %
AGE_5_9 0 %
AGE_10_19 0 %
AGE_20_49 0 %
AGE_50_64 0 %
AGE_65_UP 0 %

Below Poverty 0 %
Median Household Income 0
High Owner Cost/Income Ratio %
High Renter Cost/Income Ratio %
School Enrollment 0
Bachelors Degree or Higher %
High School Grad. or Higher %

WHITE 0 %
BLACK 0 %
INDIAN 0 %
ASIAN 0 %
OTHER 0 %

HISPANIC 0 %
Non-White + Hispanic 0 %

Number of Housing Units 0
Renters vs. Owners % vs. %
Same House in 1985 %
Median Year Structure Built 0
Houses Built Before 1940 0
Urban vs. Rural % vs. %